

# Upcoming 2007 Texas Legislative Session – Key Issues and Expectations

by **Albert Cortez, Ph.D.**

## Inside this Issue:

- ✧ **Holding on to students**
- ✧ **Timeline of the dropout issue in Texas**
- ✧ **Leadership qualities needed**
- ✧ **Tools for action**



Although the Texas legislature's actions in the area of education have proven predictably unpredictable over the last decade, the upcoming 2007 session may be considered one of the most difficult to forecast in recent history. Much of what the legislature will consider related to education (for public schools or higher education) may be impacted by budget projections.

Early fiscal projections developed by the Center for Public Policy Priorities, which is expert on state economic issues, estimate there will be a small surplus. But, most of this surplus will be needed just to cover enrollment growth in Texas schools and to deal with critical issues, such as restoring children's health insurance funding.

Although many groups were beginning to project higher revenue streams as early as the summer of 2006, significant state or national events could easily alter those expectations. This article describes possible 2007 legislative developments that we have discerned from conversations with policymakers and their staff members

as well as interactions with various groups active in Texas educational policy reforms.

## School Funding

For the first time in many years, public school finance will probably not occupy the high priority it has in past sessions, in large part because of the adoption of House Bill 1 and the funding provided to Texas public schools in the last special session. Most of that funding was used for tax reductions and very little for actual increased spending. A few clean-up items related to that newly adopted legislation may be addressed.

One issue that may be the focus of some discussion involves levels of funding provided to special needs pupils in Texas schools. It is expected that anti-special needs forces will push for setting a fixed level of funding. This would dismantle the current feature that provides automatic increases in these programs by tying them to any funding increases provided to non-special needs pupils (through the basic allotment portion of the system).

This current feature is called *weighted funding*, through which

*Key Issues and Expectations – continued on Page 2*

funding levels for certain programs are calculated as a percentage of funding provided to non-special need students. Prior to the adoption of weighted funding, programs for special populations (gifted and talented, special education, bilingual education, and compensatory education programs) were funded on a fixed dollar basis. As a result, programs for these students would remain at fixed low levels for several years, often at times when regular program allotments were increased significantly.

Opponents of such automatic increases (mostly from suburban school districts with few special needs pupils) favor fixed funding so that future allocations can more easily be reduced or maintained at locked-in low levels.

School districts with large numbers of students and with special needs pupils (including urban districts) will have reason to oppose such changes that eliminate automatic adjustment features in the current system.

Other districts that get automatic

## Having failed to provide substantive levels of state aid for facilities for many decades, the state of Texas will need to do more than create short-term band-aid responses.

increases based on district weights also may have cause to oppose such changes, since any erosion to the concept of automatic adjustments has long-term implications for other features that are based on a similar concept, including such features as small and sparse school adjustments, and cost of education factors built-in to current funding formulae.

### Funding for School Facilities

With the recent release of a state-funded facilities study that documented extensive unfunded facilities needs in Texas public schools, it is expected that the legislature will have a difficult time ignoring the issue as it has in past sessions. The recently-completed report, *Current and Future Facilities Needs of Texas Public School Districts*, was mandated by the legislature.

Preliminary data indicate that many Texas school children are provided instruction in portable buildings or in structures in need of repair. The study of more than 5,000 campuses reports the use of more than 10,500 portable facilities. School districts also report that, of 3,550 campuses rated, only 62 percent were considered in good to excellent condition, while the remaining 38 percent are rated as fair to poor. (Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, October 2006)

Having failed to provide substantive levels of state aid for facilities for many decades, the state of Texas will need to do more than create short-term band-aid responses. The state will need to incorporate state facilities funding into the overall school funding system. Failure to do so will invite yet another court challenge that

Key Issues and Expectations – continued on Page 15

## In This Issue...

### 3 Knowledge and Action

### 5 The Texas Dropout Saga

### 6 Tools for Action

### 9 Fulfilling the Promise of Mendez and Brown

### 12 Highlights of Recent IDRA Activities

### 16 Classnotes Podcast Online

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# Knowledge and Action From Dropping Out to Holding On

by María “Cuca” Robledo  
Montecel, Ph.D.

*Editor’s Note: The following is the text of a keynote address presented by Dr. Robledo Montecel, IDRA executive director, at a conference in Houston entitled, “Texas Dropout Crisis and Our Children: A Conference on Graduation Rates, Causes and Policy Solutions,” sponsored by Rice University and the Harvard Civil Rights Project.*

When it comes to the dropout crisis in Texas, some people are not waiting around. They are already doing something about this persistent problem knowing that many young people leave high school without graduating and are therefore relegated to second class citizenship.

There has never been a time in the history of education in Texas that equal educational opportunity has been a reality. Our history is marred by a two-tiered system: excellent education for the elite and substandard education for everyone else, in particular minorities and the children of the poor.

Historical and current dropout rates mirror that reality. In the last 20 years, average high school attrition rates in Texas have hovered at 30 percent to 40 percent.

What ought we to do now? In order to move from dropping out to

**The state cannot afford to spend another 20 years in a cycle of knowledge and denial. We ought not to spend another 20 years explaining away the counts and postponing the need to do something about them.**

holding on, I believe we need to link knowledge and action.

## Building Knowledge

It used to be a lonely task for IDRA, reporting attrition rates in Texas that differed from official counts by 20 or 30 percentage points. But today, thanks to researchers, there is a convergence of data that irrefutably points to a huge dropout problem.

Clear, consistent and credible data that point to where we are, to where we are headed and to whether we are getting there are essential to good public policy, accountable leadership and an engaged public. We will continue to need dropout data and knowledge that are useful and actionable around a teachers’ conference room, a board room, the local taco stand and the family kitchen table.

At IDRA, we have been working on building an actionable knowledge base. Each year, for the past 20 years, we

have published findings from our high school attrition research. And this past year, we added a searchable database that anyone can use to look up attrition rates for their county in Texas.

Most recently, under our new Graduation Guaranteed/*Graduación Garantizada* initiative, we have been piloting a school holding power portal that gives community-school action teams data on how their schools are doing on student attrition and achievement. The portal then provides data on the factors that affect attrition, achievement and school holding power at the campus level.

Knowledge about this issue of dropouts is building, making it possible to inform people, practices and policies. In recent months, we have seen new national-level attention and new foundation investment in dropout research and in reform strategies.

IDRA has just released results from our 2005-06 annual study of attrition in Texas high schools. Using consistent enrollment methodology, these data afford us a 20-year look at patterns. Here is a snapshot of our most recent findings.

Today, Texas has a 35 percent rate of attrition. This is higher than the 33 percent rate that so alarmed people back in 1986. And 137,162 freshmen, members of the class of 2002 who we expected to see in 12<sup>th</sup> grade, were

*Knowledge and Action – continued on Page 4*

unaccounted for and, therefore, do not count in many eyes.

There is a growing gap in attrition between Latino students and African American students and their White peers. Over the last two decades, attrition rates of Hispanic students have increased from 45 percent to 47 percent. For Black students, rates have increased from 34 percent to 40 percent. For White students over that period, attrition rates have declined by 22 percent. Also, rates are worsening for boys. Attrition rates for male students have increased from 35 percent to 38 percent since our first study. (See the October issue of the *IDRA Newsletter* for more information or visit the IDRA web site at [www.idra.org](http://www.idra.org).)

Over the last 20 years, more than 2.5 million students have been lost from public school enrollment. Houston has a population of almost 2 million people. It is the fourth most populous city in the nation. So losing 2.5 million students is like losing the entire city of Houston, plus Katy, Baytown, Deer Park, Galena Park, Humble, Pasadena, Pearland, Texas City, League City and Sugarland in just two decades.

Think of these numbers in another way: every four minutes, one student is lost from Texas public schools. From the time we shared coffee this morning to the time we began lunch, 52 more students were lost. By the time we finish this conference this afternoon, another 60 will be lost.

So, building knowledge is an essential step in addressing a growing public mandate to do something about these dismal dropout statistics. But knowledge alone is never enough.

The story of dropouts in Texas makes that clear. Permit me a recounting of that story.

### **Knowledge and Denial**

On October 31, 1986, IDRA completed and published the *Texas School Dropout Survey Project*.

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Commissioned by the state of Texas, it was the first statewide study of dropouts and was released in Austin at a gathering of educators, policymakers and community members.

As principal investigator for the study, I provided the gathering with key findings: many, many young people were dropping out of Texas schools, most schools reported no plans to address the fact that one out of three students were leaving school before obtaining a high school diploma, and the costs of undereducation to dropouts, their families and the state were enormous.

That 1986 study had an immediate effect on policy and practice. Soon after the study, the legislature passed state policy requiring dropout data collection and reporting. House Bill 1010 mandated that the state reduce the longitudinal dropout rate to not more than 5 percent of the total student population by 2000. A 95 percent graduation rate was to be the standard by which we measured our success.

And it was a good, straightforward start. Data collection systems were put into place at the Texas Education Agency. And the first report by TEA (1988) pointed to a statewide longitudinal dropout rate of 34 percent, just a hair different from the rates IDRA had independently reported. Also, as a result of new state policy and regulation following the IDRA study, most school districts identified dropout prevention

coordinators and developed dropout prevention plans.

But after Texas took major steps, that good start fell apart (see article on Page 5). Resources and actions soon went to explaining away the problem by blaming students or families and by lowering the dropout counts through changes in dropout definitions at the state level. The fog index shot up.

The results are evident.

The state cannot afford to spend another 20 years in a cycle of knowledge and denial. We ought not to spend another 20 years explaining away the counts and postponing the need to do something about them. As it is, if we stay on the current path, even assuming the most optimistic scenario, IDRA's statistical models indicate that it will take Texas until 2040 for us to reach the target goal of a 5 percent dropout rate set by the state back in 1988.

We must make sure 34 more graduating classes of children in the state do not have to walk the stage missing fully one third of the students they started out with.

### **Knowledge and Action**

Clearly we need to begin a cycle of knowledge and action. We must leave the knowledge and denial cycle behind.

In taking action, we must adopt proven dropout prevention strategies to help children at immediate risk of

*Knowledge and Action – continued on Page 11*





# The Texas Dropout Saga 23 Years and Counting...

by Josie D. Cortez, M.A., and Albert Cortez, Ph.D.

For more than 30 years, the Intercultural Development Research Association has committed to making schools work for all children, especially those children who are historically left behind – low-income students, minority students and those who speak a language other than English. Without a voice, these children often drop out of school, with this state and this country losing its most precious resource.

As the issue of dropout rates and graduation rates escalates from a state-level to a national-level debate with the inclusion of graduation rates mandated by the *No Child Left Behind Act*, this is a good time to look at where the state of Texas has been on this issue and what remains to be done to change course.

Following is a history of the issue in Texas, based on the Texas Education Agency's State Plan to Reduce the Dropout Rate (2003) and other sources.

## 1983

*A Nation at Risk* is published and we learn that education is in critical condition. The study calls for major reforms. (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983)

## 1984

The Texas Legislature passes House Bill (HB) 72 calling for major changes in Texas schools and a study of the dropout problem and costs.

School districts are required to publish annual performance reports that would inform communities “about the quality of education in their school districts” (Texas Education Agency, 2002). School districts themselves collect data and include aggregate student data only.

## 1986

IDRA conducts a landmark study commissioned by the Texas Department of Community Affairs and TEA. Texas finds out that it is losing 86,000 students – one third of Texas students – costing the state \$17.12 billion.

TEA reports statewide student performance and progress.

## 1987

The Texas Legislature passes HB1010, making state and school districts responsible for counting and reporting dropouts and finding ways to lower the dropout rate.

TEA is required to establish a

dropout information clearinghouse and to work with eight other state agencies to coordinate policies and resources for the dropout problem.

A dropout definition is added: “a student in grades seven through 12 who does not hold a high school diploma or the equivalent and is absent from school for 30 or more consecutive days with no evidence of being enrolled in another public or private school” (Texas Education Code 11.205, 1988).

School districts are required to have one or more “at-risk coordinators” to support students who are deemed at risk of dropping out of school.

The State Board of Education requires districts to have a plan ready by the next year (1988) that would help identify students who are at risk and help them stay in school.

“At risk” is defined (for 7-12 grades). The definition focuses on student failure and “environmental, familial, economic, social, developmental or other psychosocial factors” rather than school holding power and school factors that failed students.

The State Board of Education adopts its first long-range plan for Texas public schools. This four-year plan focuses on closing the achievement gap

*Texas Dropout Saga – continued on Page 6*

and lowering the dropout rate.

TEA calculates its own longitudinal dropout estimate and reports that 34 percent of ninth-grade cohort students drop out before graduating—close to IDRA’s 33 percent attrition rate. It also calculates and reports an annual dropout rate of 6.7 percent.

## 1988

TEA reports a 6.7 percent annual dropout rate.

Dropout data collection begins in 1987-88 with dropout numbers computed directly from school district reports.

## 1989

TEA reports a 6.1 percent annual dropout rate.

HB850 denies a driver’s license to anyone under 18 years old who does not have a high school diploma or a GED or who was not enrolled in school for at least 80 days the previous semester or enrolled at least 45 days in a high school equivalency program.

SB152 has the State Board of Education reduce the statewide longitudinal dropout rate to 5 percent by 1997-98, meaning that Texas commits to graduating at least 95 percent of its students and following them from seventh grade to 12<sup>th</sup> grade to make sure Texas lives up to its commitment.

SB1668 expands the “at-risk” definition to include pre-kindergarten through sixth grade. This means that a 4-year-old could be considered “at risk” of dropping out. It also opened the door for alternative education for students who are considered to be “at-risk.” Students could now be removed from regular school settings to “alternative” ones, which results in stigmatizing them and increasing the chances they would drop out.

SB417 increases the amount of time that students had to be in school,

# Tools for

## Enlightened Public Policy – A Lever of Change

IDRA emerged in 1973 as the only entity in the state dedicated exclusively to the reform of the public school finance system. IDRA conducted the necessary research to substantiate the claims made earlier by the plaintiffs in the *Rodríguez vs. San Antonio ISD*, which had been overturned. IDRA provided state agencies and others with extensive information on the need for reform; prepared and distributed materials; and awakened educators, lawmakers, government officials and the general public to the inequities in the system of school finance and their implications for children’s educational opportunities.

Since then, IDRA has broadened its scope to include other issues related to excellence and equity in education. IDRA’s Quality Schools Action Framework outlined by Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel a year ago positions “enlightened public policy” as one of three levers of change, along with engaged citizens and accountable leadership, to strengthen school holding power and student success. Enlightened public policy provides both the appropriate standards and the resources schools need to serve all children.

## A Snapshot of What IDRA is Doing

**Developing Leaders** – IDRA is briefing state and local policymakers to provide research and analyses of critical issues for the next legislative session. Some of these issues include school finance, school holding power, and college access and success.

**Conducting Research** – Recently, IDRA has been analyzing data related to disciplinary alternative education programs in Texas to assess the impact they are having on the state’s students and schools. IDRA’s study in 1999 found that these programs were being used as dumping grounds for “undesirable” students who, once there, got little support. The latest research shows that the same is true today.

**Informing Policy** – IDRA has been presenting its findings on the state of school holding power in Texas public schools and strategies for improving those figures at gatherings and conferences in recent months. For example,

*Tools for Action continued on next page*

# Action

Texas House Bill 1, passed in May, has widened the equity gap by 30 percent. Sharing this vital information is important in helping stakeholders know what has been lost and develop tools to take action for change.

**Engaging Communities** – Through its *Brown* and *Mendez* Community Action Dialogues, IDRA is sharing data and strategies for engaging Latino and African American communities. These dialogues are sparking cross-sector and multicultural dialogue and local action about what can be done together, across all racial groups, to create schools that are equitable and excellent for *all* children. This information is especially important for community members and parents so that the promise of these Supreme Court decisions, that transformed the nature of U.S. public education, can be fully met.

## What You Can Do

**Get informed.** Ask your school officials about procedures for reporting civil rights complaints and violations. Inquire about appeals processes regarding student placement concerns, disciplinary actions and general treatment of students. The law requires that these processes be posted.

Seek information and get involved in discussions around school funding. Inquire about how your schools are funded in comparison to others locally and in the state.

**Get involved.** Host and participate in local dialogues and meetings that value diversity and promote working across groups to create access and inclusion for all children and families.

Recommend appropriate changes in policy and practices to break down local barriers to access and success for all students.

**Get results.** As a resource, IDRA has developed a community action guide that outlines seven actions that communities can take as steps to fulfilling the promise of *Brown* and *Mendez*. This booklet outlines seven areas that are emerging from these discussions, such as fair funding, accountable schools, teaching quality, ensuring access and inclusion, and strengthening school holding power. The booklet, *A Community Action Guide – Seven Actions to Fulfill the Promise of Brown and Mendez*, can be ordered from IDRA for \$12.50 or downloaded free online at <http://www.idra.org/mendezbrown/promise.html>.

*Texas Dropout Saga – continued from Page 6*

lowering the age that a student must begin school from seven to six, and remaining in school until they were 17 instead of 16. And a student had to attend school at least 80 days per semester to receive course credit.

Students under 19 who returned to school and graduated got a “second chance” with a program created through the Office of the Governor, providing tuition credits for higher education to job opportunities.

“At-risk” programs flourish at all grade levels, but almost all focus on “fixing” students or their families rather than on school causes.

Concerns with data quality spur the legislature to create a new school and district rating category named “not rated due to data quality” based on finding that district dropout data submissions are late, missing or unreliable. The number of districts unrated due to data quality declines notably after one year.

## 1990

TEA reports a 5.1 percent annual dropout rate.

The Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) is established including reporting annual graduation and dropout rates.

Dropout “recovery” begins a statewide search of reported dropouts enrolled in other school districts. “Search” is confined to finding students who re-enrolled in Texas public schools but had been reported as dropouts in the previous year’s dropout reports, with corresponding adjustments made to district counts. Students who indicated that they were re-enrolling in Texas schools but never were accounted for are not used to adjust original district dropout counts.

## 1991

TEA reports a 3.9 percent annual dropout rate.

*Texas Dropout Saga – continued on Page 8*

TEA begins reporting annual graduation and dropout rates in its *Snapshot* publication and *Pocket Edition* highlighting Texas education statistics.

## 1993

TEA reports a 2.8 percent annual dropout rate.

The “at-risk” list grows and now includes student pregnancy and parenthood.

The legislature adopts Chapter 35 of the Texas Education Code. AEIS data are now to be used to rate school districts and campuses for accountability ratings and targets the dropout rate as a performance indicator.

TEA reviews dropout data from previous years and removes previously reported dropouts from the current year. For example, if “John” dropped out of school in 1990 but re-entered school and dropped out again in 1993, TEA removed “John” from the 1993 list.

TEA does not count expelled students as dropouts if they are expelled for certain school-related offenses and if their term of expulsion has not expired.

TEA does not count students as dropouts if they drop out to receive a GED.

## 1994

TEA reports a 2.6 percent annual dropout rate.

TEA uses annual dropout rates for grades seven through 12 as an indicator for *exemplary* and *recognized* ratings only.

## 1995

TEA reports a 1.8 percent annual dropout rate.

TEA begins using annual dropout rates for *all* categories used to rate districts and campuses (*exemplary*, *recognized*, *acceptable*,

*unacceptable*).

The dropout definition is removed from state law and from State Board of Education rules. This opens the door for state dropout count manipulation, with the TEA commissioner given broad discretion in defining and calculating dropouts.

Students who meet all graduation requirements but do not pass the state-mandated exit-level Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) are not counted as dropouts.

Students who withdraw from school to “return to their home country” are not counted as dropouts. Unverifiable transfers to another school are not counted as dropouts.

The State Board of Education can no longer apply rules regarding dropouts or at-risk criteria. School districts can no longer use other possible risk factors. They can only use those listed in the statute and report only those in the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS).

School districts are no longer required to prepare separate plans to lower the dropout rate. District and campus improvement plans can include dropout prevention plans. Districts are still required to provide compensatory and accelerated instruction to students considered at risk of dropping out.

The state dropout information clearinghouse and interagency task force are eliminated in new state legislation.

TEA is still required to publish annual dropout statistics from data collected from school districts and to develop a state plan to lower the dropout rate.

## 1996

TEA reports a 1.8 percent annual dropout rate.

TEA considers using a high school “completion rate” instead of dropout rate, as allowed by legislation, which also replaces the *graduate* with the broader *completer* category.

## 1997

Students are now required to attend school until they are 18, raising the required age from 17 established in 1989.

TEA begins using “leaver codes” to undercount dropouts. Over time, the number of leaver codes goes from 37 to 43 to 30. Under fire at the state and national level for unreliable and unbelievable dropout rates, TEA reduces the number of codes by collapsing categories. Nothing changes.

## 1998

TEA is able to track individual seventh graders through high school using a new student record keeping system.

## 1999

TEA includes the “actual measures of student progress grades seven through 12 longitudinal dropout rates for the class of 1998” in AEIS.

Money is provided to school districts to focus on dropout prevention at every level: preschool, early elementary, after-school programs for middle schools, and ninth grade.

TEA stops counting *all* expelled students as dropouts.

## 2001

HB1144 adds grades nine through 12 “completion” rates. The focus is now on “completers” rather than dropouts.

An annual independent audit of school district data submissions is required in response to widely circulated reports on districts’ data falsification and manipulation of dropout information.

SB702 requires TEA’s annual report to include performance of open enrollment charter schools, which mostly serve students who are deemed at risk as compared to performance of





# Fulfilling the Promise of Mendez and Brown

## Implications for Leadership

**by Rosana G. Rodríguez,  
Ph.D., and Abelardo  
Villarreal, Ph.D.**

Public schools belong to their communities. Families, communities, educators and other diverse stakeholders who form part of an informed and engaged public concerned about the welfare of their children and the strength of their public schools must exercise shared leadership and shared accountability for schools' success in educating their children.

Certainly, our schools and communities need to address equal access and representation of races in programs of excellence and opportunity. Building upon traditional civil rights efforts that focus on issues of race and gender, our schools and communities in the future also must become places that value the complexity of thought and perspective that diversity brings, as well as the challenges and opportunities that it represents.

The 50th anniversary of the *Brown vs. Board of Education* Supreme Court ruling in 2001 highlighted the challenges that continue to slow the full realization of the promise of educational equality and equity among underserved minority groups. This momentous event was an opportune occasion to reflect on its promise and act on its full realization.

**Carrying out an effective plan requires a new breed of leaders, ones who are visionary and who possess the skills necessary to forge and sustain effective partnership within the complexity of diversity.**

African American and Latino communities share a common need to demand excellence and equity in education. They share the negative consequences of an often indifferent and irrelevant educational system. Through planning and acting as a united force, these communities can craft education changes that will eliminate academic achievement gaps between the “haves” and the “have nots.” The impact that these two communities can have on initiating educational reform cannot be ignored.

During the anniversary year of the *Brown* decision, IDRA launched an initiative that has evolved into the “*Brown and Mendez* Blueprint Dialogues for Action,” a series of community dialogues by African American and Latino leaders focused on education. The initiative is now poised to be taken to scale with blueprint dialogues held throughout the United States. These will gather cross-race, cross-sector leaders in communities across the country to

plan and lead actions to strengthen neighborhood public schools for the benefit of all children.

Why dialogue on diversity with a focus on fulfilling the promises of the *Brown* and *Mendez* court rulings? A history of underperformance created by inequity, disregard and educational disengagement of minority children requires us to take a new collective and inter-connected path for our children's sake and for our own. Within the *Brown* and *Mendez* initiative lies the expectation that diverse leaders will be more strategic in their approach to equity, access and excellence for all children. The expectation is that this approach to diversity will move across sectors and race in deliberate ways to work past the challenges of diversity and complexity and beyond past divides to achieve local goals that improve educational opportunities in local communities.

Embedded within the civil rights issues that undergird this work, there is a mandate for a new type of leadership to emerge. The majority of participants in the *Brown* and *Mendez* dialogues at the community level come from diverse backgrounds and sectors. Adding to this complexity, race is central to planning a blueprint for quality education for all students.

Carrying out an effective plan requires a new breed of leaders,

*Implications for Leadership – continued on Page 10*

ones who are visionary and who possess the skills necessary to forge and sustain effective partnership within the complexity of diversity. R. Roosevelt Thomas Jr. identifies the new paradigm for future leaders as follows: “Future leaders will differentiate between representation and diversity. Representation will refer to the presence of multiple races and both genders in the workplace, while diversity will refer to the behavioral differences, similarities and tensions that can exist among people when representation has been achieved” (2006).

We must learn to thrive within this diversity because the essence of creativity and human development demands that we embrace the complexity of human interactions reflected in more diverse settings in order to take thought beyond where it has been and identify effective solutions and new pathways. This will require new skills, new ways of understanding and valuing different perspectives, histories, values and diverse cultural and linguistic roots. We all will need to understand how to build trust and plan together for the greater good in an increasingly complex environment of diversity, whether in a classroom or a board room, in our families or in community settings.

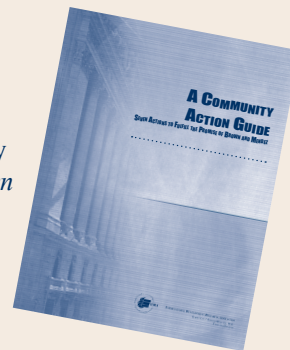
Leaders who articulate a vision that can be shared by all are those who are able to acknowledge and surpass their own discomfort and the tensions that diversity can create. These are courageous voices and indelible spirits who struggle to make important collective decisions despite that tension and complexity. They are the ones who dare to try, to begin to trust one another or to regain trust that was once broken.

They have honesty to recognize their own limitations as well as their own strengths and to value others, who, while different from themselves, are struggling with similar issues. In fact, they are ones who realize that within the

## **A Community Action Guide – Seven Actions to Fulfill the Promise of Brown and Mendez**

By Rosana G. Rodríguez, Ph.D., Bradley Scott, Ph.D., and Abelardo Villarreal, Ph.D.

This booklet details seven critical actions community members can take to help fulfill the promise of *Brown vs. Board of Education* and *Mendez vs. Westminster* in the education of African American and Latino students.



This booklet also includes a step-by-step tool for developing a blueprint for action in a local community. It presents an action planning process that navigates local participants through vision building, focused planning, local environmental scanning and constructing the actual blueprint for local action.

It also provides a community assessment instrument that, when used as a foundation for discussion and action, generates a clear direction local stakeholders can embrace to bring about real action to fulfill the promise of *Brown and Mendez*.

**\$12.50 or free online at [www.idra.org](http://www.idra.org)**

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very complexity that diversity brings lies untapped strength and creativity for a better future. Our ability to navigate within that complexity will result in the momentum necessary to move us forward from vision to action so that we can collectively create a new reality that is better for us all.

With funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation and in collaboration with local partners and civil rights leaders, IDRA is providing the structure, process and setting for two new dialogues. Local participants will provide the commitment and ingenuity as pioneers in a new way of thinking and planning collectively for the greater good.

The IDRA *Brown and Mendez* community dialogues are now moving beyond Texas into Albuquerque, New

Mexico, in November 2006, and Little Rock, Arkansas in January 2007.

Visit the IDRA web site to learn more about this initiative and how these two communities make plans for their future. You can also contact IDRA if you are interested in helping to host a *Brown and Mendez* blueprint dialogue in your community.

### **Resources**

Thomas Jr., R. “Diversity Management: An Essential Craft for Leaders,” *Leader to Leader* (Leader to Leader Institute and Jossey-Bass, Summer 2006) Number 41, pg. 45.

Rosana G. Rodríguez, Ph.D., is director of the IDRA Community and Public Engagement. Abelardo Villarreal, Ph.D., is director of the IDRA Division of Professional Development. Comments and questions may be directed to them via e-mail at [comment@idra.org](mailto:comment@idra.org).

dropping out. That cannot wait.

But we must also go beyond stop-gap measures and get at the deeper causes of attrition.

To graduate students who are prepared for later life, schools need competent, caring teachers who are well-paid and supported in their work. That means teachers are well prepared, placed in their field of study and informed by continual professional development.

To increase school holding power, schools need consistent ways to partner with parents and engage the communities to which schools belong. Effective partnerships are based on respect and shared goals of academic success and integrate parents and communities into school decision-making.

Student engagement is also integral to any good plan to reduce attrition. Schools need ways to get to know students and, in turn, to have students know that they belong. Schools need the capacity to create environments that value students of all backgrounds and to incorporate them into learning and school life in ways that strengthen their sense of connection and promote their academic achievement.

School holding power also depends on a high quality, enriched and accessible curriculum. Recent research on math curricula and college participation found that among students whose parents did not go to college, 64 percent of students who took advanced math courses (beyond Algebra II) attended college, compared to 11 percent for those who only took Algebra I and geometry (Texas Guaranteed Student Loan Corporation, 2006). Curriculum quality and access are absolutely essential for student success.

To have these basic features (quality teaching, parent and community engagement, student engagement,

quality curriculum), school systems must secure two fundamentals: good governance and the resources to serve every student effectively.

Fair funding is central to the success of our school system. And right now that is not in place.

House Bill 1, passed last May, has widened the equity gap by 30 percent. Texas' top 50 wealthiest schools are 72 percent White. Texas' poorest 50 schools – our most under-resourced schools – are 94 percent Hispanic. (See IDRA's analysis in the August issue of the *IDRA Newsletter*.)

### **Taking Action Seriously**

So the question is, are we serious about getting results for every child?

We need to be honest about the fact

**As it is, if we stay on the current path, even assuming the most optimistic scenario, IDRA's statistical models indicate that it will take Texas until 2040 for us to reach the target goal of a 5 percent dropout rate set by the state back in 1988.**

that, right now, we plan for 30 percent attrition and we budget for a two-tiered system. We assume that fewer students will graduate than started in the ninth grade and even fewer children will graduate than started in kindergarten. This assumption is built into teacher hiring practices, into ways schools deal with parents and communities, into whether and how schools connect with kids, and into curriculum decisions about which courses will be offered and to whom. Student attrition is built into facilities planning and funding decisions.

What would planning for success mean? In 2005-06, as I mentioned, 137,162 students were lost from Texas public schools. If we budgeted \$6,000 per student, we would need to plan on investing another \$8.2 billion and we would need more than 5,000 new classrooms across the state, more teachers, more labs, more guidance

counselors, more technology, and more textbooks.

Too expensive? We are already paying the price. Over the last two decades, the inability of schools to hold on to students through high school graduation has cost the state of Texas about \$730.1 billion in forgone income, lost tax revenues, and increased job training, welfare, unemployment and criminal justice costs.

We know, on the other hand, from IDRA cost studies that every \$1 invested in education, yields a \$9 return.

In fact, Texas economist Ray Perryman estimates that just a 10 percent reduction in dropouts would produce 175,000 new Texas jobs and \$200 billion in economic output

(Zellmer, 2004).

Texas has the capacity, the ingenuity and the resourcefulness to get results. The Texas gross state product (GSP) was forecast to reach \$924 billion in 2005. If Texas were a nation, its economy would rank as the 10th largest in the world. (Business and Industry Data Center, nd)

We cannot afford *not* to adopt a new cycle of knowledge and action. Our sense of what is right demands it; our children deserve no less.

One of my favorite sayings has always been: *Mirate in la mirada de un niño, mirate en la esperanza*. See yourself in the eyes of a child, see yourself in hope.

A middle school tutor in IDRA's Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program brought this home to me. She wrote a poem about what it was like to be selected as a tutor for younger children

*Knowledge and Action – continued on Page 12*



*Knowledge and Action – continued from Page 11*

when she and others had come to define her only by her deficits and by being “at risk.” We have data that shows the positive results of this dropout prevention program. But no chart, no table, can communicate that value as well as the words she sent to me. She wrote:

*I used to like having people control my life,  
but now I am more confident.*

*I used to think school was no good,  
but now, thanks to school, I am what I am.*

*I used to believe I hated education,  
but now, because of it, I’m reaching my goals.*

*I used to wish I was never born,  
but now I’m thankful to God for giving me life.*

We need one kind of Texas educational system: An excellent system, where all students graduate from high school prepared for college or the world of work, no matter what the color of their skin, the language they speak, or where they happen to be born.

## Resources

Business and Industry Data Center. Overview of the Texas Economy (Austin, Texas: Office of the Governor, Economic Development and Tourism, nd) <http://www.bidc.state.tx.us/overview/2-2te.htm>.

Cárdenas, J.A., and M. Robledo Montecel, and J. Supik. *Texas School Dropout Survey Project* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development

Research Association, 1986).

Cortez, A. “Perspectives on the Texas Legislature’s Latest School Funding Plan,” *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, August 2006).

Johnson, R.L. “Texas Public School Attrition Study, 2005-06: Gap Continues to Grow,” *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, October 2006).

Robledo Montecel, M. “Time to Make High School Graduation the New Minimum,” *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, October 2006).

Texas Guaranteed Student Loan Corporation. Online data (2006) <http://www.tgslc.org/>.

Zellmer, J. “Education: Investing in our Future,” School Information System, Madison, Wisconsin, School District, online resource (October 7, 2004) <http://www.schoolinfosystem.org/archives/2004/10/index.php>.

María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, Ph.D., is the IDRA executive director. Comments and questions may be directed to her via e-mail at [comment@idra.org](mailto:comment@idra.org).

# Highlights of Recent IDRA Activities

In September, IDRA worked with **4,012** teachers, administrators, parents, and higher education personnel through **48** training and technical assistance activities and **131** program sites in **11** states plus Brazil. Some topics included:

- ◆ Math Smart! Classroom Demonstrations
- ◆ Bilingual Reading Strategies in the Content Areas
- ◆ Creating a Literacy-Rich Environment for Young Children

Some participating agencies and school districts included:

- ◆ East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana
- ◆ South San Antonio Independent School District, Texas
- ◆ National School Boards Association

## Activity Snapshot

The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program has made an extraordinary difference in the lives of more than 23,000 students by keeping 98 percent of them in school. The lives of more than 416,000 children, families and educators have been positively impacted by the program in the United States, Puerto Rico, the United Kingdom and Brazil. In the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, created by IDRA, secondary students who are considered to be at risk of dropping out are placed as tutors of elementary school students, enabling the older students to make a difference in the younger students’ lives. With a growing sense of responsibility and pride, the tutors stay and do better in school. The program supports them with positive recognition, instruction and support.

Regularly, IDRA staff provides services to:

- ◆ public school teachers
- ◆ parents
- ◆ administrators
- ◆ other decision makers in public education

Services include:

- ◆ training and technical assistance
- ◆ evaluation
- ◆ serving as expert witnesses in policy settings and court cases
- ◆ publishing research and professional papers, books, videos and curricula

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regular school districts.

SB702 also requires a measurable state plan to reduce the dropout rate and changes TEA's biennial report to an annual report. New dropout rate information that must be reported includes: (a) projected cross-sectional and longitudinal dropout rates for grades nine through 12; (b) dropout rates of students in alternative education programs; and (c) completion rates for students in grades nine through 12.

HB457 does not count students as dropouts if they are in correctional facilities or residential treatment centers and if, when they were released, they do not re-enroll in the district where the facilities are located if that district is not the student's home district.

TEA develops a state plan to reduce the dropout rate as required by Texas Education Code. *The 2001-2005 State Plan to Reduce the Dropout Rate* (Texas Education Agency, 2002) contains seven goals:

1. Adopt high expectations – fundamental premise is that all students can learn and succeed in school.
2. Strive for teacher and administrator renewal – recruit new, especially minority, teachers and administrators in areas with highest incidences of dropouts.
3. Eliminate obstacles to student success – eliminate educational policies and practices that are barriers.
4. Adapt organizational structure – provide learning continuum at all levels to address diverse academic, social and special student needs.
5. Provide appropriate assessment and instructional strategies – assess student progress ongoingly with multiple measures to inform methods and pacing of instruction.
6. Establish stakeholder partnerships – foster public school alliances with parents, community-based

organizations and businesses.

7. Identify and support statewide best practices – coordinate between TEA, education service centers and school districts to identify and implement best practices.

## 2003

TEA reports a 0.9 percent annual dropout rate.

Texas modifies dropout counting procedures to conform to standards of the National Center for Education Statistics, which count as dropouts students enrolled in a GED program, students who meet all graduation requirements but do not pass the state exam and students previously counted as dropouts, among other procedures. These changes will be reflected in the 2005-06 TEA reports.

TEA further refines the state plan. *The 2003-2014 Strategic State Dropout Prevention Plan* (Texas Education Agency, 2003) presents six goals:

1. By 2013-14, all Texas students will graduate from high school.
2. By 2002-03, TEA will develop a comprehensive dropout prevention action plan that will be updated on an ongoing basis according to identified needs.
3. By 2002-03, TEA will create a dropout prevention center. The center will:
  - Identify effective research-based dropout prevention practices and programs;
  - Coordinate statewide efforts to provide research-based dropout prevention and reentry dropout program resources and technical assistance;
  - Identify and implement with education service centers and other dropout prevention partners state, regional and local professional development activities; and
  - Plan and implement ongoing state and regional forums on issues related to dropout

prevention.


4. By 2005-06, all Texas students including those in “high poverty schools” will be taught by “highly qualified” teachers.
5. By 2006-07, the annual dropout rate for grades seven through 12 and the longitudinal rate for grades nine through 12 will be reduced by 1 percent and 5 percent, respectively.
6. By 2013-14, all Texas students will reach high standards, attaining proficiency or better in reading and mathematics.

## Reflections

After 23 years, what is next? The state's education goals for its children and youth remain high—as high as they were 23 years ago. By 1997-98, 95 percent of Texas youth were supposed to be graduating from high school. After all of the state plans, all of the leaver codes, all of the re-calculations, according to IDRA's attrition estimates, the state of Texas is losing one student every four minutes.

If Texas is to reach its goal of graduating at least 95 percent of its students, then it must change course – from masking the number of dropouts to making each child count, from dropout prevention or recovery to a graduation plan for each student, from dropping out to school holding power, from at-risk students to high school reforms that produce high school graduates.

There are decades of research and experience that point to effective practices and programs, including IDRA's own Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program for dropout prevention and IDRA's Quality Schools Action Framework for school system change. This state knows what to do to make this goal a reality. We just need the collective will to start down a new and more promising road.



# What every teacher should know about migrant students

## New CD & Resource Guide for Teachers of Migrant Students

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This interactive CD and guide for teachers of migrant students provides insights about migrant students in your classroom and best practices within migrant education programs. Whether you are an experienced teacher or new to teaching migrant students, you will benefit from this resource. This is also a useful tool for administrators and counselors.

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Developed and distributed by the Intercultural Development Research Association.

*Texas Dropout Saga – continued from Page 13*

### Resources

Cárdenas, J.A. and M. Robledo Montecel and J. Supik.  
*Texas Dropout Survey Project* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, 1986).

National Commission on Excellence in Education.  
*A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for School Reform* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of

Education, April 1983).

Robledo Montecel, M. "A Quality Schools Action Framework – Framing Systems Change for Student Success," *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, November-December 2005).

Texas Education Agency. State Plan to Reduce the Dropout Rate, working document (Austin, Texas: Texas Education Agency, August 2002) pg. 6.

Texas Education Agency. The 2003-2014 Strategic State Dropout Prevention Plan, working document (Austin, Texas: Texas Education Agency, April 2003).

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*Key Issues and Expectations – continued from Page 2*

will, for the first time, be based on concrete evidence of the state's long-standing neglect in this area.

## Keeping the Public in Public Education

Proponents of privatization through vouchers have made it clear that they intend to spearhead another effort to divert public tax monies to fund vouchers to subsidize private schooling. Voucher proponents are expected to promote a "pilot" project involving only large urban districts (no one has questioned why wealthy suburban schools are spared the privilege of having their children become subjects of state experiments). But opposition is still likely from all major education groups, parent organizations and minority communities that are more committed to improving their neighborhood schools than to pursuing promises of presumably better schools built on the other side of town.

## Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs

Recent research conducted by IDRA on the status of disciplinary alternative education programs indicates that many of the reforms recommended in our 1999 policy brief have gone untended. Our research indicates that the number of DAEP referrals has increased to more than 100,000 students, that minority students remain over-represented among those referred, that four out of five referrals are for violations other than the serious offenses that served as the basis for creating these programs, that the number of days placed has mushroomed to more than six weeks, and that DAEP students are performing at levels of more than 20 points lower than state averages in math and reading.

Data on coordination between the sending schools and DAEPs is still not collected, and no information

on the quality of staff available is summarized or reported at either the state or local levels. If serious reforms are not considered and adopted in the 2007 session, it is probable that these dysfunctional responses to what are essentially teacher and administrator discipline management issues will be challenged in state or federal courts.

## College Access

Improving access to higher education may be one of the key issues debated in 2007. Increased college fees and other charges coupled with stagnant state financial aid programs have no doubt contributed to the state's inability to meet its "Closing the Gap" targets especially those targets set for increasing minority student enrollments. Minority students constitute the majority (61 percent) of all Texas students in public schools, while White students account for the remaining 39 percent. Demographers warn that continued failure to increase Hispanic and African American enrollment and graduation spells disaster for Texas' future economy.

In a preview of such developments, the new Toyota plant in San Antonio announced that it had gone outside of Texas to recruit candidates for its higher level jobs due to the lack of qualified workers produced in Texas schools and universities.

Though there may be debate about changing the 10 Percent Plan that guarantees state university enrollment to top graduates of all Texas high schools, any proposed reforms will have to address the need for improved minority and low-income pupil recruitment and financial aid support as a critical feature of any new initiative.

## School Holding Power

Recent evidence that verifies that Texas official graduation rates are inflated creates possibilities for reform in 2007. Given the fact that Senator Gonzalo Barrientos – the most

persistent voice for reform in this area – will retire in December 2006, new leadership will be needed if the issue is to be addressed.

## Summary

All of these prospective conversations will take place in a climate in which other state services, including children's health insurance and similar critical infrastructure issues that have been long neglected by state government, will be demanding a place at the table.

No doubt some efforts will claim to improve Texas public schools. Many of those efforts would be dysfunctional, such as expanding incentive pay, excluding certain children from public schools, and eliminating programs that provide comprehensible instruction to children learning English. Perhaps we need to focus on *less* – less testing (and start using a sampling approach that yields insights into school performance without punishing students or teachers), less emphasis on blaming students or families for failing state tests (and more providing the resources they need to learn), and less effort to disenfranchise communities by re-directing public money to fund private schools (and more investing in our public schools while continuing to hold them accountable).

Developments over the next month will yield clearer indicators of leanings of the 2007 legislative session. In the absence of court-mandated reform, it will be interesting at best to watch what emerges – the good, the bad and perhaps, with continuing lack of state leadership on the issues, perhaps even some ugly results.

## Resource

Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts. *Current and Future Facilities Needs of Texas Public School Districts* (Austin, Texas: Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, October 2006).

Albert Cortez, Ph.D., is director of the IDRA Institute for Policy and Leadership. Comments and questions may be directed to him via e-mail at [comment@idra.org](mailto:comment@idra.org).

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**Episode 2: “Using the New High School Allotment in Texas”** – Dr. Albert Cortez, director of the IDRA Institute for Policy and Leadership, outlines ways the new high school allotment can strengthen your school’s holding power, the importance of measuring results and opportunities the new funds present.

**Episode 3: “The Power of IDRA’s Parent Leadership Model”** – Aurelio Montemayor, M.Ed., director of the IDRA Texas Parent Information and Resource Center, describes the four dimensions of the IDRA’s model for parent engagement and how it can unleash powerful transformations for school success.

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